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A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR A NEW CENTURY

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A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR A NEW CENTURY

In his *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (hereinafter "the document"), President Clinton announces that "the goal of the national security strategy is to ensure the protection of our nation's fundamental and enduring needs – protect the lives and safety of Americans, maintain the sovereignty of the United States, with its values, institutions and territory intact, and provide for the prosperity of the nation and its people."¹ He also firmly states that the strategy will achieve three core objectives of "enhancing our security, bolstering our economic prosperity and promoting democracy."²

This essay will examine the core objective of promoting democracy and human rights in light of the essential elements of a national security strategy (assumptions, ends and means, and resources, including whether they are integrated to into a coherent strategic framework), discuss why it is flawed as a core objective of national security strategy, and then offer a remedy.

Sound strategic analysis properly begins with a critical examination of the unstated assumptions. The unstated assumption in this case is that the American public is prepared to support promoting democracy and human rights as the third core objective of our national security strategy. There is no evidence to support this assumption. The American public is unlikely to support such an objective, particularly if it involved large costs or, even worse, loss of life. Indeed, the *Times Mirror* published a survey in 1995 revealing that only 21 percent of Americans surveyed favored promoting and defending human rights in foreign countries as a top

¹ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 1997), 5.

2 Ibid

priority and even less, 16 percent, favored promoting democracy in other nations as a top priority³ The *Times Mirror* obtained similar results (22 and 22 percent respectively) in its 1993 Survey⁴ Thus, a fundamental premise of the promoting democracy core objective is flawed, the American public does not support it as such What the third core objective really reflects, then, is nothing more than the policy makers' own values concerning what America's proper role should be As such, it is moralistic, i e , reflecting a sense of how America *should* be engaged, it is idealistic in that it supposes that what works in America will work in other, very different countries and cultures, and it is nonrepresentative in that it is not reflective of the public will

Most strategists also agree that "the end," the formulation of strategic goals, particularly core strategic goals, should be shaped by the national interest and that a clear definition of the national interest is an essential precondition to an effective strategy In trying to find the national interest in promoting democracy and human rights abroad, it is instructive to note that nowhere in the document is it listed as a vital national interest and, thus, deserving of its status as a core objective Indeed, the entire discussion under the heading, "Promote Democracy" contains no mention of this objective as even an interest, let alone a vital interest, of the United States The only place in the entire document where the word "interest" is associated with democracy is in the section entitled "The Imperative of Engagement," in which it merely states that "the trend toward democracy and free markets throughout the world advances American interests The United States must support this trend by remaining actively engaged in the

³As cited in the Memorandum from Alvin Richman to Ann Pincus, Subject Issues Heading The American Public's Agenda for 1996, United States Information Agency, April 10, 1996, 4-5

⁴*Ibid*

world."⁵ While the first sentence likely is accurate, it hardly leads to the conclusion in the second sentence, particularly where, as will be pointed out later in this essay, there is another alternative approach to supporting the trend that is less intrusive and, arguably, likely to be at least as effective. There is not even a hint that promoting democracy and human rights is essential to national survival, or even that it is necessary to maintain national welfare and prosperity. It is this author's belief that the document's failure to classify promoting democracy and human rights as a vital national interest is accurate and, therefore logically leads to the conclusion that it should not be included as a core objective in our national security strategy. This conclusion is even supported by the structure of the document, in which promoting democracy and human rights is listed as the third (not the first or second) core objective and, when, compared to the other two core objectives, has very little space devoted to it.

Even if we accept that promoting democracy and human rights is desirable, we still must determine whether it is feasible, i.e., whether the means exist to accomplish it. Generally, there are three "tools" available to promote our objectives: diplomacy, incentives, and threats of or actual punishments. In his preface to the document, President Clinton advocates renewing our commitment to using diplomacy as a means to promote democracy, though he specifically refers to using money to accomplish this. Nowhere in the document does he elaborate on exactly how this is to be done. In light of the shrinking availability of money for such purposes, this approach seems doomed to little, if any, chance of success.

Historically, wealthier countries often used incentives such as foreign aid, trade preferences or concessions in financial agreements to pursue their objectives. Now, however,

⁵*A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, 2

with the dwindling availability of money, countries are more likely to resort to sanctions

Indeed, the document specifically states we must be willing to use strong measures, including economic sanctions, against human rights violators. The problem is that sanctions have largely been unsuccessful in producing the desired result, whether it be economic sanctions in Haiti or an attempt to withhold most-favored-nation trading status in China. Even the examples cited in the document where we have imposed sanctions (Nigeria, Iraq, Burma and Cuba) have not produced measurable positive results. There is no evidence to support a hope that such tools would be any more successful in promoting democracy and human rights in the future.

The document does not clarify whether the "strong measures" we must be prepared to take against human rights violators include force, e.g., by military action. In light of the *Times Mirror* survey cited above indicating a lack of public support for such action, this omission is likely intentional. It does not appear to be a viable option under foreseeable circumstances.

A final reason for not adopting the promotion of democracy and human rights as a core strategic objective is that it is questionable whether it will work or whether it is even applicable in all parts of the world, particularly where there are significant cultural or religious differences, e.g., China and Islamic areas. Indeed, foreign countries often object to such moralistic "preaching" and even go so far as to suggest we solve our own problems at home before we attempt to pressure them to change. From the above, it is clear that the third core objective, promoting democracy and human rights, is not integrated into a coherent strategic framework.

These arguments against giving the promotion of democracy and human rights the status of a core objective of our national security strategy are not to be read as saying we do not have some legitimate interest in their promotion, only that they are not a core objective and there is no

need to project these values intrusively by direct interference with other nations' internal affairs, particularly at a time when we are facing resource constraints Instead, we can pursue "the oldest form of national value projection, captured first in the eighteenth century evocation by John Winthrop of the United States as a 'City upon a Hill'"⁶ Demonstrating the desirability of democracy and human rights by example is the most effective means of ensuring other nations will follow, consistent with their beliefs, traditions and abilities Granted, this approach requires more patience than an intrusive method, but, as anyone who has raised children knows, example is the best teacher and motivator It does, however, require more circumspect actions on the part of the teacher and a great deal more patience than a forceful approach As with children, the results in promoting American values of democracy and human rights by example are much more likely to be successful and long-lasting Further, they will be greatly reinforced by the explosion of the information age Exposure to American values through mass media, movies, the internet, etc , is only likely to increase in the foreseeable future And, the increasingly global economy, with its additional opportunities for American business influence, provides the concurrent opportunity for promoting American values, almost certainly in a much more meaningful and effective manner than by intrusive methods

Thus, the thrust of this essay is not one of doom and gloom for America's interest in promoting democracy and human rights Rather, it is a mere recognition that they do not amount to a core strategic objective and that they are achievable by the nonintrusive means of example, supplemented by the information explosion and private sector influence

⁶Terry Deibel, "Strategies Before Containment Patterns for the Future," from *International Security* 16 (Spring 1992), 97

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